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Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Mali

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2071 (2012), adopted on 12 October 2012, in which the Council requested that I should report on the implementation of the resolution, in particular with regard to the provision of support by the United Nations to the Malian political process and to the planning for a potential deployment of an international military force to assist the Malian armed forces in recovering the occupied regions in the north of the country. The report summarizes major political and security developments in Mali since January 2012, outlines the United Nations multidimensional response to the crisis, presents the activities carried out by the Organization to implement the resolution and makes recommendations with regard to the way forward.

II. Developments since January and United Nations response to the crisis

A. Political and security developments

2. Mali is confronted by a profound crisis with serious political, security, socioeconomic, humanitarian and human rights consequences. At stake are the country's national unity, territorial integrity and its tradition as a multi-ethnic, secular democracy. The crisis stems from long-standing structural conditions such as weak State institutions; ineffective governance; fragile social cohesion; deep-seated feelings among communities in the north of being neglected, marginalized and unfairly treated by the central Government; a weak and externally dependent, albeit vibrant, civil society; and the effects of environmental degradation, climate change and economic shocks.

3. These conditions were exacerbated by more recent factors of instability. Domestically, the Malian ruling elite was perceived in many quarters as guilty of corruption, nepotism and abuse of power. Within the armed forces, especially among the rank and file, a widespread sense developed that the central Government had neglected its obligations, diverting significant resources from the counter-insurgency efforts in the north to enrich a few corrupt senior officers. The capacity of the military units deployed in the north thus became progressively weakened as a result of poor logistics, inoperable equipment and low morale.

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4. In mid-January 2012, a Tuareg movement known as the Mouvement national pour la libération de l'Azawad (MNLA), along with Islamic armed groups including Ansar Dine, Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO), in addition to deserters from the Malian armed forces, initiated a series of attacks against Government forces in the north of the country. The Tuareg rebellion was emboldened by the presence of well-equipped combatants returning from Libya in the wake of the fall of the regime there.

5. On 22 March, a mutiny by disaffected soldiers from the units defeated by the armed groups in the north resulted in a military coup d'état. A military junta, the Comité national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de l'Etat, led by Captain Amadou Sanogo, took power, suspended the Constitution and dissolved the Government institutions.

6. The coup accelerated the collapse of the State in the north, allowing MNLA to easily overrun Government forces in the regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu and proclaim an independent State of Azawad on 6 April. Shortly thereafter, tensions pertaining to ideological and programmatic approaches emerged among the armed groups in the north and, by 18 November, Ansar Dine and MUJAO had driven MNLA out of the main towns of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. These groups now control two thirds of Malian territory.

7. Immediately after the coup, on 27 March, the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) appointed the President of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, to mediate in the crisis. They also announced the activation of a 3,000-strong ECOWAS standby force to be used if the rebels refused to accept a peaceful solution to the conflict in the north. On 6 April, the military junta and ECOWAS signed a framework agreement that led to the resignation of the then President, Amadou Toumani Touré, on 8 April and the appointment of the Speaker of the National Assembly, Dioncounda Traoré, as interim President on 12 April. The agreement provided for the establishment of a transitional Government, headed by a prime minister with executive powers, who would be responsible for organizing the elections — initially scheduled for March 2012 — and for addressing the security and humanitarian crisis in the north. It also provided for an amnesty law to be adopted by the parliament for the members of the junta. It failed, however, to address such important issues as the timeline for the transition, the modalities for the organization of the elections and the role of the junta during the transition. On 17 April, Cheick Modibo Diarra was appointed interim Prime Minister.

8. Most of the presidential guard, known as the "red berets" and considered an elite force, did not support the coup. On 30 April, they launched a counter-coup, which failed, and some 20 of them were arrested. Their alleged disappearance, along with the status of approximately 30 other detainees, remains of concern. Investigations into these cases have been slow.

9. On 21 May, the interim President was attacked and severely beaten in his office by a group of demonstrators allegedly favourable to the coup. After two months of medical treatment in France, he returned to Bamako on 27 July, following a commitment by the junta to guarantee his physical protection. Upon his return, he announced his intention to establish a high council of State comprising a president and two vice-presidents, one in charge of national political dialogue and the other

responsible for security matters; a consultative national transition council; and a national negotiating commission. The last-mentioned was expected to engage in peace talks with those groups in the north that rejected violence and extremism. In a decree dated 8 August, he appointed Capt. Sanogo to chair a military committee to monitor the reform of defence and security forces and to oversee military operations. On 20 August, the Prime Minister announced the formation of a Government of national unity consisting of 32 members.

10. Various armed groups, including terrorist and affiliated entities, continue to control northern Mali. They reportedly have some 3,000 core combatants and are recruiting more, especially among children. They are well armed, with relatively sophisticated equipment obtained from Libya and weapons captured from the Malian armed forces. Drug traffickers and other criminal elements have also established themselves in these regions and are building relationships of cooperation with the terrorist groups. The towns of Douentza, Gao, Menaka, Ansongo and Gourma are currently under the control of MUJAO, which largely comprises foreign fighters. Timbuktu and Tessalit are both under the control of AQIM, while Kidal is controlled by Ansar Dine. AQIM has destroyed a number of holy, historic and cultural sites in Timbuktu, including some listed as World Heritage sites by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. AQIM has established Islamic police in Dire, Goundam and Douentza and MUJAO has done so in Gao. MUJAO is supported by combatants from the terrorist group Boko Haram, which is active in Nigeria. Ansar Dine is also reported to have ties to Boko Haram. These groups have created a context in which most cultural and recreational activities are prohibited, thus rejecting and combating the cultural identities and undermining the social fabric of the communities of the north. The groups reportedly support one another's efforts to retain control of the occupied regions, as demonstrated by the assistance provided by AQIM to MUJAO in repelling the recent attempts by MNLA to retake Gao.

11. Following the coup d'état, my Special Representative for West Africa, Said Djinnit, offered the support of the United Nations to the Malian authorities. As a result, in a letter dated 30 August, the President requested United Nations assistance to build the capacity of the Malian transitional authorities in the areas of political negotiation, security sector reform and humanitarian assistance. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali addressed a similar letter to my Special Representative for West Africa on 19 September, in which he sought assistance in the areas of elections and governance.

12. In response to those requests, I deployed a preliminary assessment mission to Bamako from 1 to 5 October to engage with the transitional authorities and seek clarifications about the details of the assistance required. The team also held discussions with a broad cross section of Malian society, thus obtaining a more refined understanding of the situation on the ground. It formulated recommendations on United Nations assistance to strengthen Malian capacity in the political, military/security, governance and humanitarian and human rights fields, which are reflected later in the present report.

13. There is broad consensus that there is a need for a political process to generate a road map to end the transition and promote national reconciliation; external military assistance to liberate the occupied areas in the north; and elections to end

the transition and fully restore constitutional order. There are, however, disagreements on how to achieve those objectives.

14. The leaders of the transition are bound together in a fragile alliance of necessity, while representing different and, at times, competing constituencies and interests. They are also subject to intense pressure from a divided society. The lack of alignment in the positions of the country's key partners, namely the core countries, ECOWAS and the broader international community, is an additional complicating factor. Consequently, the space available to these leaders to formulate a common strategic vision for their country is severely constrained. The consolidation of the partnership among the Malian leaders constitutes the single most important contribution that the international community can make to the political process in the country.

15. The team found that the Malian military was highly politicized, bitterly divided and poorly trained and equipped, which threatens the stability of the country and may derail the transition. Nevertheless, some military and security units have maintained a core of professional officers and troops, in addition to a minimum level of functionality. Furthermore, the military hierarchy appears increasingly determined to reorganize itself to face the immediate threats posed by terrorist and other criminal groups in the north.

16. The team also learned that, in recent years, the Malian defence and security forces had been inadequately trained and poorly equipped and supported. They also lack efficient mechanisms of civilian control and oversight. Many of the team's interlocutors expressed the view that the country's ruling elite had interfered with the process of recruitment and the training and promotions systems, which had caused grave distortions in the chain of command, compromised military professionalism, damaged the esprit de corps and created resentment among officers and the rank and file.

B. Humanitarian situation

17. Since mid-January, when the rebel military offensive began, the humanitarian situation in the country has gradually deteriorated. The scope of the humanitarian crisis has increased for local populations who are unable to cope with both the chronic and generalized food and nutrition insecurity in the region and the massive inflow of displaced persons.

18. Civilian displacement as a direct consequence of fighting in the north has occurred on a large scale. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as at 1 November, a total of 412,000 persons had been forced to flee their homes. This figure includes some 208,000 refugees who are currently hosted in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mauritania, the Niger and Togo. An additional 204,000 individuals have been internally displaced and are currently living in extremely difficult circumstances, reliant on humanitarian assistance and the solidarity of relatives and friends who are providing hosting arrangements.

19. The health system in the north is also disrupted. While the cholera outbreak is under control with no new cases in more than a month, it must be monitored closely, given that any population movement in a context of limited access to water and sanitation services may increase the risk of cholera and other diseases. In addition,

population movements, often including livestock, place additional pressure on scarce natural resources, such as grazing land and water, and create an increased risk of conflict between refugees and local populations. While the food and nutrition security situation is slowly becoming less serious in the south of the country, where approximately 80 per cent of the needs are concentrated, critical humanitarian gaps remain underfunded in key sectors that need to be addressed to ensure the sustainability of humanitarian achievements. The collapse of the State in the north has triggered a severe contraction in the provision of basic social services.

20. International humanitarian organizations currently have restricted direct access to civilian populations in need of assistance, including internally displaced persons. United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations continue to work through their national staff and in close cooperation with civil society organizations, community leaders and religious institutions to make critical interventions but, owing to the prevailing insecurity, their practical reach is confined mainly to the urban areas of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal.

C. Human rights situation and protection of civilians

21. The human rights situation in Mali, especially in the north, has continued to deteriorate since January. Extremist Islamist groups have reportedly committed gross human rights abuses, including summary and extrajudicial executions, sexual and gender-based violence, recruitment and use of child soldiers, torture and looting of hospitals. It appears that there have been changes in the pattern, character and prevalence of the abuses since the beginning of the crisis. Serious abuses, including sexual violence, summary executions and pillaging, were reportedly committed by the armed groups during the military offensive. At the outset, when MNLA was in control of parts of the territory, there were reports of sporadic human rights abuses. Since the extremist Islamist groups of Ansar Dine, MUJAO and AQIM have taken control, other types of abuses are being witnessed, mostly relating to the implementation of an extremely strict interpretation of sharia law. Executions, floggings and stonings, among other cruel and inhuman punishments, have been reported. While the figures are not high, they are of concern inasmuch as they might be indicative of an evolving pattern. Freedom of speech and assembly and the rights of women and children are also being curtailed.

22. Regarding the situation in the south of the country, the status of some 30 detainees, in addition to the alleged disappearance of some 20 soldiers in connection with the counter-coup of 30 April, remains of concern. The investigations into these cases have been slow and it is crucial that thorough and prompt investigations be completed as soon as possible. This will be especially important in the context of the request by the authorities for the United Nations to assist the Malian security forces, given that the Organization's human rights due diligence policy makes United Nations assistance to non-United Nations security forces conditional upon their respect for human rights and humanitarian law. Reports have also been received that mines are being laid in a number of northern areas by some armed groups, an issue that will need to be addressed as part of the stabilization plan.

23. Tracking of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence in the period from December 2011 to November 2012 highlights grave violations against women

and girls in northern Mali. The practice known as "requisition", reportedly used by rebels in Gao, involves the systematic gang rape of women and girls forcibly held overnight in rebel camps. As neighbourhoods are targeted in rotation and obliged to fulfil their requisition obligations, no sector of the community is left untouched. The cultural context of northern Mali means that women and girls who are raped will often be rejected by their families and communities, denying them the personal accompaniment and support networks that they so urgently need.

24. Cases of forced marriage have been reported in all areas under rebel occupation, including instances of young women forced into unions with members of the armed groups in circumstances where the marriage arrangement is simply a cover to legitimize the reality of abduction and rape, which in some cases could amount to sexual slavery.

25. Owing to the prevailing insecurity and access constraints, it has not been possible for the United Nations to verify reports and to determine the magnitude of violations or identify the perpetrators. Where direct access has been possible, the United Nations and its partners have lent support to the operation of 10 centres providing psychosocial and legal support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. There is, however, an urgent need to put in place basic services for such survivors, including medical and psychosocial support and socioeconomic assistance. The United Nations has continued to urge ECOWAS, the African Union and other partners to send strong messages to all the parties to the conflict to immediately cease rape and other forms of sexual violence and to stress that perpetrators will be held accountable for their crimes. In addition, efforts are being made to ensure that the prevention of sexual violence is adequately reflected in all discussions related to ceasefire and peace agreements.

26. Grave violations against children in northern Mali have been a salient characteristic of the crisis since it began. All armed groups in the north, including MNLA, Ansar Dine, MUJAO and AQIM, are reported to have targeted children, resulting in the recruitment of hundreds of minors into their ranks. Particularly alarming are reports of training camps in Gao run by armed groups, in addition to reports of cross-border recruitment of children in refugee camps in Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger — a protection risk that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and partners engaged in the refugee response in neighbouring countries are working to address. Allegations of the association of children with self-defence militia groups supported by the Government in the south of the country have also been received.

27. The Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights travelled to Mali from 4 to 8 October to undertake a preliminary assessment of the human rights situation. His findings have been shared widely with a view to, among others, including measures to mitigate the human rights impact of the planning of the proposed military intervention in Mali. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights also dispatched a mission to Mali, also visiting Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger, from 12 to 21 November, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 21/25, by which the Council requested the High Commissioner to submit a written report at its twenty-second session, in March 2013, on the situation of human rights in Mali, in particular in the northern part of the country. In addition, the Office conducted a preliminary assessment of the impact of the crisis on neighbouring countries as part of the mission.

D. Development

28. The economic situation of Mali has been affected by the political and security crisis. Mali is expected to enter recession in 2012, with an economic growth rate of -3.1 per cent. Some emergency relief notwithstanding, economic activity and basic public services throughout the country have been severely disrupted. The sectors most affected include construction, agro-industry and the manufacturing industry, in addition to all branches of the service sector, including trade and financial services. Mali is facing a revenue shortfall. As a result of the crisis, the Government has written off as unrecoverable 400 billion CFA francs ($800 million) of the targeted revenue for 2012 of 1.34 trillion CFA francs. Spending plans have been slashed accordingly. The suspension of external financing by donors has caused a State budget shortfall of 391 billion CFA francs ($782 million) for 2012.

29. The crisis has also affected key socioeconomic indicators and the living conditions of the population. Preliminary estimates indicate that at least 663,000 people may have fallen into poverty. Urban populations are most affected because of job losses in construction, services and the informal sector and the arrival of large displaced populations to the cities. Whereas the Government was planning to create 30,000 jobs in 2012, 20,000 have been lost owing to the crisis.

30. Following the coup d'état and the suspension of development cooperation and aid by some development partners, the United Nations country team has been at the centre of efforts to coordinate and mobilize development partners to reengage with the transitional authorities and help them to maintain access to basic social services, limit the impact of the crisis on the lives of the most vulnerable and ensure social stability throughout the transition. To this end, it has developed a common framework for the provision of United Nations support to the transition, which focuses on the following three key areas of intervention: governance and peace consolidation; access to social services; and humanitarian response support. Support is being provided to key transitional and governance institutions to build their institutional capacity. Efforts are being made to ensure that the political process, in particular the national dialogue, is inclusive of the concerns of all key constituencies in Malian society. An integrated peace and development programme for the north will be developed. The United Nations country team will continue to work closely with the transitional authorities, development partners and civil society to build institutional capacity and promote activities aimed at increasing the resilience of Malians, especially those most vulnerable to social and economic shocks.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 2071 (2012)

A. Provision of support to the political process

31. Since the adoption of resolution 2071 (2012), the United Nations has stepped up its support to the efforts of the Malian authorities to enhance their internal cohesion, promote national reconciliation and strengthen State institutions so that they can gradually take ownership of the resolution of the crisis affecting their country. On 19 October, the Deputy Secretary-General, accompanied by my Special Envoy for the Sahel, Romano Prodi, and my Special Representative for West Africa, participated in the second meeting of the Support and Follow-up Group on the

Situation in Mali, held in Bamako on 19 October. Senior representatives of ECOWAS, the African Union, the European Union, the core countries, the International Organization of la Francophonie and major bilateral partners were also present.

32. The African Union strategic concept for the resolution of the crisis in Mali, which was adopted in Bamako and subsequently endorsed by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union on 24 October, has greatly contributed to framing the international response to the crisis by providing for greater coordination between Malian stakeholders and international actors. It also includes recommendations regarding governance challenges in Mali, the restoration of State authority in the north, the reform of the security sector and the preparations for elections.

33. Since the second meeting of the Support and Follow-up Group, my Special Representative for West Africa has intensified his shuttle diplomacy with the Malian transitional authorities, other national stakeholders, regional leaders and the ECOWAS Commission. Given the consensus that a strong political pillar is essential to addressing the challenges that confront Mali, the central objective of these contacts is to promote a political process consistent with both resolution 2071 (2012) and the African Union strategic concept. These discussions have focused primarily on forging convergence among the key leaders, including on the need for a return to constitutional order through elections and establishing the foundations for negotiations aimed at addressing the legitimate concerns of the Tuaregs and other communities in northern Mali.

34. The discussions held by my Special Representative for West Africa have revealed a mixed picture. On the one hand, Malians generally agree that there is a need for a political process consisting of a national dialogue, negotiations with groups and communities in the north that present legitimate grievances and preparations for elections. On the other hand, profound differences remain as to whether the national dialogue should be a constitutive forum, with powers to alter the Constitution, or a more modest consultative exercise, where participants simply exchange views and make recommendations that may or may not be followed by the executive authorities. Influential opposition groups consider that, to date, the preparations for the national dialogue have not been sufficiently inclusive and transparent. Consequently, they are threatening to boycott the entire political process until their concerns are addressed. Clearly, these internal divisions constitute the single most important obstacle to progress in the political process and must be addressed urgently and effectively. In this regard, the transitional authorities have indicated to my Special Representative that they welcome direct United Nations involvement in support of the political process.

1. National dialogue and development of a transitional road map

35. In October, the Prime Minister established a 50-member organizing committee for the preparation of the national dialogue, which will decide on the road map for the transition and the electoral process. The committee submitted to the interim President three options papers on the timeline for the transition, the elections and transitional institutions. These proposals were not, however, unanimously welcomed by the members of the Malian political class, some of whom disagree with the composition of the organizing committee and the Government's plans for the national dialogue process.

36. During his recent visits to Mali, my Special Representative for West Africa met the interim President, the Prime Minister, Capt. Sanogo, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of Territorial Administration, the Bureau of the National Assembly, the Ombudsman, key political blocs and civil society. During those exchanges, he emphasized that Malians bore the primary responsibility for addressing and resolving the crisis in their country, while stressing that there was a need for unity of purpose among the country's regional and international partners. In particular, he encouraged all Malian actors to enhance national cohesion, create the conditions for inclusive dialogue and present a coherent road map for the transition with clear timelines for elections.

2. Negotiations with groups occupying the north of the country

37. The ECOWAS mediator for Mali, in collaboration with the core countries, is actively pursuing a negotiated solution to the conflict in the north. On 6 November, at a meeting in Ouagadougou in the presence of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali, a delegation from Ansar Dine confirmed its willingness to engage immediately in negotiations with the transitional authorities. The group committed itself to a cessation of hostilities, enabling the free circulation of people and goods and facilitating humanitarian access in the areas under its control. It also affirmed its rejection of all forms of violence, extremism and terrorism, pledging to fight cross-border organized crime. The ECOWAS mediator is also encouraging MNLA and Ansar Dine to adopt a common platform to negotiate with the transitional authorities.

38. On 13 November, while in Ouagadougou for consultations with the ECOWAS mediator, my Special Representative for West Africa met the Secretary-General of MNLA, Bilal Ag Acherif, who stressed that dialogue was the only solution to the crisis in Mali and that the declaration of independence of Azawad issued by MNLA on 6 April was intended to draw the international community's attention to the fate of the population in the north. He also stressed that the United Nations could play a key role in the search for a solution to the crisis with the ECOWAS mediator.

39. My Special Representative for West Africa also met a delegation from Ansar Dine led by Algabass Ag Intalla, a prominent member of its leadership, who indicated that, since 1963, the population in northern Mali had been marginalized by the central Administration and that the National Pact for the Re-establishment of Peace, Brotherhood and National Unity in Northern Mali of 1992 and the Algiers Accord of 2006 had failed to address their grievances. He explained that the aim of the statement issued by Ansar Dine in which it had distanced itself from AQIM was to prevent a situation in which war would be the sole option. He stated that, although previous agreements had not been fully implemented, the group remained committed to a negotiated solution without preconditions. He praised the role of Algeria and Burkina Faso in fostering dialogue and warned that the military option would attract jihadists to northern Mali.

40. On 14 November, my Special Representative for West Africa met in Abidjan the President of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS and President of Côte d'Ivoire, Alassane Ouattara, who expressed his full support for the efforts by the ECOWAS mediator to create the conditions for a swift launch of the negotiations process between the Malian authorities and the armed and rebel groups in the north, on the basis of the key parameters reiterated in the final communiqué

issued by the Authority at an extraordinary session held in Abuja on 11 November. Mr. Ouattara also insisted on the fact that, consistent with the provisions of resolution 2071 (2012) and the African Union strategic concept, the international community had to concomitantly assist ECOWAS in pursuing the two-track approach of negotiations with those groups open to dialogue and military preparations that would ultimately serve the purpose of neutralizing the terrorist groups and organized criminal networks in northern Mali. He was continuing to impress upon the Malian leadership the need to rapidly set in motion the mechanisms envisaged for holding the negotiations.

41. My Special Representative for West Africa has also impressed upon all Malian stakeholders the importance of seeking a negotiated settlement to the situation in northern Mali and, in this regard, the urgency of setting up the negotiations committee announced by the interim President in July. The transitional authorities and most Malians have expressed support for a negotiated solution to the crisis. In this regard, the authorities have defined the following clear parameters for their engagement in negotiations: respect for the territorial integrity and unity of Mali; respect for the secular nature of the Constitution of 1992; and the need for the groups concerned to distance themselves from terrorist and organized crime networks, in particular AQIM. The interim President has confirmed that efforts are under way to engage with those groups. The envisaged negotiations committee would, once established, complement such efforts. The Prime Minister has called for direct negotiations between the transitional authorities and groups in the north and has asked that the ECOWAS mediator gradually transfer ownership to Malians. Both the interim President and the Prime Minister have requested United Nations assistance in building the capacity of the envisaged negotiations committee. To this end, a United Nations mediation expert has been deployed to assist in building the capacity of Malian actors to conduct effective negotiations.

3. Elections

42. The coup d'état prevented the presidential election from being held on 29 April as originally scheduled. Before the coup, the United Nations had been providing technical electoral support in several areas, including reinforcing the capacity of electoral management bodies, training polling agents, raising voter awareness and undertaking voter registration.

43. The occupation of the north has left Mali with three options: to prioritize urgent elections in order to rapidly establish a democratically elected Government and parliament, regardless of the limited access in the north; to wait until there is a sufficient State presence in the north to allow for the holding of elections in certain localities; or to await the full restoration of State authority throughout the country before holding elections. Under the first option, there is a high risk that the population in the areas controlled by rebel and armed groups will be excluded from the electoral process, which would also send the message that the south accepts the status quo in the north. This option is rejected by the transitional authorities, most political parties and civil society groups. The second option assumes that either the negotiation process, or an international military intervention, or the combination of both, will lead to the re-establishment of at least a partial presence of the State, thus enhancing the participation of northern communities in the elections and the legitimacy of the vote. Option three holds out the prospect of a lengthy transition until the territorial integrity of Mali is fully restored. These options, in addition to

the more technical aspects of the elections, are expected to be discussed as part of the national dialogue.

44. The focus of the United Nations has shifted towards helping the Malian authorities to create conditions for the conduct of transparent and credible elections during the transition period. To this end, three immediate steps have been identified: reform of the electoral laws, revision of the voter registers and holding of presidential and legislative elections. A number of challenges remain, however, including a decision on the timing of elections and the adoption of a realistic and consensual timeline by Malian stakeholders, the adoption of a budget and the establishment of an independent national electoral commission.

45. Looking forward, it is expected that the security situation, the need to replace electoral equipment and infrastructure in the north and the introduction of new voter registration technologies will increase the cost of the elections. A United Nations electoral needs assessment mission is currently in Bamako to help the Malian authorities formulate a detailed and realistic electoral timetable, taking into account the options referred to above, to recommend ways of addressing the challenges facing the electoral process and to recalibrate technical and financial support being provided by the United Nations to the electoral process.

B. Support to the security process

46. In June, the ECOWAS Commission initiated an evaluation of the feasibility of deploying a stabilization force to help the Malian authorities to re-establish the territorial integrity of the country. An initial planning conference was held in Abidjan from 11 to 15 June, for which the United Nations and international partners provided advisory and planning support. That conference resulted in the development of an approach to address the security crisis in Mali. On 14 June, ECOWAS and the African Union requested a Security Council resolution that would authorize the deployment of an ECOWAS stabilization force to support the political process in Mali, assist in upholding its territorial integrity and combat terrorism in the country. Following the adoption of Security Council resolution 2056 (2012) of 5 July 2012, the United Nations continued to support ECOWAS, the African Union and countries in the region in developing the objectives, means and modalities of the envisaged deployment and other possible measures.

47. A technical assessment mission to develop plans for a possible international stabilization force was conducted from 8 to 17 July in Bamako, under the leadership of the Special Representative for Mali of the President of the ECOWAS Commission, Aboudou Touré Cheaka. The mission included members of the ECOWAS Standby Force and the African Union. A multidisciplinary United Nations team participated in an advisory capacity.

48. On 2 August, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, in a letter addressed to me, presented the ECOWAS concept for the resolution of the crisis in Mali. ECOWAS organized a further planning conference, held in Bamako from 9 to 13 August, in which the Malian authorities, the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union and other international partners participated, and during which the concept of operations for the ECOWAS force was further developed in consultation with the Malian defence and security forces.

49. On 1 September, the transitional authorities sent a letter to ECOWAS, in which they requested military assistance to reorganize the armed forces and restore the country's territorial integrity. On 23 September, the transitional authorities sent another letter to ECOWAS on the conditions for the deployment of ECOWAS troops in Mali. The transitional authorities, in a letter dated 18 September, and ECOWAS, in a letter dated 28 September, both requested a Security Council resolution that would authorize the deployment of an international military force to assist the Malian armed forces, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, in order to recover the occupied regions of the north of the country.

50. Since the adoption of resolution 2071 (2012), the United Nations has further assisted ECOWAS and the African Union in the joint planning effort to determine the means and modalities of deploying such an international military force. On 20 October, I dispatched a multidisciplinary United Nations team to Abuja to consult the ECOWAS Commission, take stock of planning efforts and prepare for a joint planning conference. The strategic concept for the resolution of the crisis provided a framework for the planning conference, which was held in Bamako from 29 October to 5 November at the initiative of the African Union and ECOWAS, in close consultation with the Malian authorities, with participants from Algeria, Canada, France, Germany, Mauritania, the Niger, the United States of America, the United Nations and the European Union. A harmonized joint concept of operations was developed, aligning at the strategic level the separate operational plans of the Malian defence and security forces and the proposed international military force.

51. The harmonized joint concept of operations was subsequently endorsed by the chiefs of defence staff of ECOWAS on 6 November, by its Mediation and Security Council on 9 November, by its Heads of State and Government on 11 November and by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union on 13 November. In a letter dated 13 November, the African Union Commission conveyed to me the harmonized joint concept of operations and the communiqué issued by the Peace and Security Council at its meeting on the same day. In that communiqué, the Peace and Security Council urged the Security Council to give its full support to the strategic concept and the harmonized concept of operations, and to authorize, for an initial period of one year, the planned deployment of an African-led international support mission for Mali, under Chapter VII of the Charter. The Peace and Security Council also urged the Security Council to authorize the establishment of a support package funded by United Nations assessed contributions, in order to facilitate the speedy deployment and operations of the mission.

52. Under the harmonized joint concept of operations, the African Union, in consultation with ECOWAS, would appoint a special representative to head the mission. A special representative of the African Union would also provide political and strategic oversight of the military and police personnel comprising the international force. The office of the special representative would include civilian expertise and liaison capacity in such areas as political affairs, humanitarian affairs, human rights, security sector reform, justice and corrections and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration.

1. Strategic operational framework

53. The harmonized joint concept of operations, endorsed by the African Union and ECOWAS, is referred to as the "strategic operational framework" in recognition

of its aim to frame, at the strategic level, the separate but interdependent operational plans of an international force and of the Malian defence and security forces. Its strategic end state would be the creation of the conditions necessary for a stable, democratic State that exercises authority over its national territory, assumes its responsibilities with regard to the protection of the population, property and livelihoods and addresses regional security challenges, in particular international terrorism and transnational criminal activities.

54. The strategic operational framework defines the modalities of an African-led international force to support the Malian defence and security forces in developing the necessary capabilities, recovering the occupied regions in northern Mali and reducing the threat posed by terrorist and affiliated groups. Militarily, the end state would be the restored territorial integrity of Mali, with reduced threats from terrorist and affiliated groups and transnational criminal activities; a sufficiently secure environment maintained by operationally capable Malian defence and security forces for the consolidation of State authority, the maintenance of territorial integrity and the protection of the population; and established conditions for the restoration of basic services, social amenities and the return of the population. To achieve those objectives, it is proposed that the international force deploy to Mali for an initial period of one year.

55. The operation would take place within the territorial boundaries of Mali and, as operationally required, along the border areas and within defined areas of neighbouring countries, subject to their agreement and within appropriate legal frameworks. As areas are recovered, the Malian authorities would progressively re-establish State authority and maintain law and order and public safety. Once territorial integrity has been restored, the Malian defence and security forces would support stabilization activities led by the authorities to restore and maintain security in the post-conflict environment. At that juncture, the international force would have achieved its purpose and that phase of the mandate would end. Other operations, to be coordinated with regional and international partners, would continue to address the residual terrorist and criminal threats in the Sahel region.

Mandated tasks of the African-led international operation

56. The international force would support the Malian defence and security forces in three overlapping phases: building the capacity of the defence and security forces; recovering the occupied regions in the north and reducing the threat of terrorist and affiliated extremist groups and transnational crime; and making a transition to stabilization activities by the authorities to maintain security and consolidate State authority through appropriate capacities.

57. To that end, the international operation would assist in equipping, training and providing logistical support to the Malian defence and security forces. Most of that support is expected to come from international partners and would provide offensive and enabling support to the defence and security forces to recover the occupied regions in northern Mali. Furthermore, the actions of the international force would contribute to establishing a secure environment for the restoration of State authority, including through the redeployment of rule-of-law and security institutions and the restoration of law and order and public security and safety in the north as areas are recovered. The international force would also help the authorities to create a secure environment for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the voluntary return of

internally displaced persons and refugees. Lastly, the force would support the authorities in their primary responsibility to protect the population with regard to international human rights and international humanitarian and refugee law. In addition, the police elements of the international force would secure force staff, premises and equipment; ensure the security and freedom of movement of force personnel; reinforce the centre for the coordination of operations to secure the transitional institutions; and strengthen the operational capacities of the national security agencies, including with regard to crowd control, through specialized training, in coordination with international partners.

Composition and generation of the African-led operation

58. The international operation would comprise 3,300 personnel, including infantry battalions and appropriate enabling capacity, such as engineers, fire support, air assets and logistics, and a police element, including formed police units.

59. The military and police would be generated from the ECOWAS Standby Force and from contributions from other countries, with the focus on generating battalions for better interoperability and cohesion, and with the appropriate capabilities for the desert environment and the threat in northern Mali. ECOWAS has received pledges for military and police personnel from several of its member States and has undertaken some field assessments. The pledges need to be reconfirmed and assessments of their capacities undertaken, including against the final force requirements, in order to identify the critical capacity gaps. Pledges are still required, including for air support assets and personnel (combat and utility aircraft and logistic air transport), engineers, additional fire support capabilities, intelligence, counter-improvised explosive device equipment and training. Some basic and specialized training and equipment will also be needed, based on the individual readiness of the military components. The African Union, in close consultation with ECOWAS, may be best placed to undertake the task of generating the required forces and capabilities, based on the principles of the African Standby Force. The capacity to generate the requisite military and police personnel and capabilities will be vital to ensuring the successful execution of the operation.

Composition and capabilities of the defence and security forces

60. The Malian defence and security forces would provide 5,000 personnel for the military operation to recover the occupied regions in the north, while the remaining forces would continue to provide security in the south. Additional forces required for the operations would be generated through recruitment and training, and through the use of the National Guard, as appropriate.

61. The availability of equipment is a challenge, since a significant amount was lost as a result of the withdrawal of the Malian armed forces from the northern regions early in 2012, and taking into account the low serviceability rates of equipment. While an audit will be undertaken by a bilateral partner, the Malian armed forces are facing critical capacity gaps, including in logistics (capability and associated equipment and vehicles), air support (armed, utility and transport), major combat vehicles (in particular armoured personnel carriers), weapons and communications equipment. A preliminary audit of the security institutions (national police, the national gendarmerie, the National Guard and civil protection) indicates

that they also have equipment and logistical shortages, including transportation and crowd-control equipment.

62. There is also a requirement to support the longer-term process of transforming the security sector architecture. This needs to be balanced with immediate efforts to bolster its operational capacities to restore territorial integrity, as described above. The framework agreement of 6 April recognized supporting the security sector as a key priority and the authorities have established a military committee to monitor the reform of defence and security forces, as provided for therein.

Command, control and coordination mechanisms

63. The operation to achieve the objectives outlined above would be conducted by two forces, the international force and the Malian defence and security forces. The authorities would have primary responsibility for restoring territorial integrity, while the international force would support them. The Malian forces would lead these operations, with the international force providing offensive and enabling support. Military operational command would be through separate commanders for the Malian defence and security forces and the international force, who would report to the Malian Joint Chief of Staff and an African Union-appointed special representative, respectively. A joint planning and coordination centre would be established to support both commanders, in order to coordinate the operation and enhance interoperability.

64. A joint coordination mechanism would also be established comprising the ministers of defence of Mali, the contributing countries, the core countries, Algeria, Mauritania and the Niger, in addition to other interested parties, to provide support and assist the special representative. The chiefs of defence staff of the member countries would form a subordinate technical advisory working group. The United Nations and other international partners would also participate in the joint coordination mechanism, as appropriate. Stakeholders providing support to the Mission would, in consultation with the special representative, coordinate their activities and facilitate the implementation of their support through a partners' coordination forum. Partners may also directly contribute, as appropriate, at the political and tactical levels.

2. Logistical support requirements

65. The international force and the Malian defence and security forces would require logistical support for the operation. This is in addition to the capability and other requirements for the operational readiness of the two forces. Logistical and other support would be required down to an appropriate level in the field for all operational phases through a supply chain that would be established, and that would depend on the provision of the requisite transport. A main logistics base for holding and maintaining strategic reserve stocks and providing central services would be established, as well as additional bases, as required, which would include medical, maintenance, supply, communications and information technology services, fuelling points and engineering services. Units of the international force would initially need to be self-sufficient on deployment for a period of at least 90 days, after which support would be required through external arrangements. This would require pre-positioning of mobile stocks and the establishment of key logistic capacities such as fuel, food and water, ahead of troop deployments. The strategic operational

framework identifies 10 days of self-sufficiency. The resulting gap would therefore need to be addressed through external support.

3. Analysis of the strategic operational framework and proposed operation

66. The strategic operational framework is the result of negotiations between key interested stakeholders, principally the Malian authorities, the African Union and ECOWAS, with support from key partners, including the United Nations. The framework, which was endorsed by the African Union on 13 November, could provide a useful basis for consideration of the call by the African Union for a Security Council resolution authorizing the proposed African-led international support mission for Mali, although the planning for the operation remains a work in progress. It could also provide a basis for the development of more detailed harmonized operational plans by the international force and the Malian defence and security forces. Joint planning needs to continue to fully develop the details of their operations, however. Such planning would need to take into account further political developments and corresponding developments on the ground, and to ensure that a secure environment is created for civilians and the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Planning will also need to be synchronized with regional and international plans in such areas as counter-terrorism, border control and countering criminal networks.

67. Effective command, control and coordination mechanisms will be essential, as will legitimate State and international oversight mechanisms. The continuing planning effort recommended above will need to ensure that such command, control and coordination mechanisms are further elaborated. A clear division of roles and responsibilities at the tactical level between the international force and the Malian armed and security forces will also emanate from the joint planning efforts that are under way.

68. The strategic operational framework allows for the unintended consequences that a military operation might have on the fragile humanitarian and human rights situation in northern Mali and, as a result, on the chances for sustainable peace. The overarching obligation of the authorities to ensure the protection and security of all citizens, on an inclusive and non-discriminatory basis, should inform the further planning and discharge of the mandated tasks of both forces. The continuing planning process should ensure that such recognition is made operational in the detailed plans, including with regard to the possible increased displacement of persons, with direct consequences for humanitarian operations in neighbouring countries, and the potential to trigger targeted retaliatory attacks. Appropriate training in international humanitarian and human rights law, civil-military coordination, the rights of the child, humanitarian demining and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, should form part of the preparations in that regard. Internal, human rights and humanitarian law advisory and oversight capacity should be deployed as part of the mission, in order to ensure that measures are put in place for its strict compliance with international law and accountability.

69. The effective implementation of the strategic operational framework is based on the assumption that the international force and the Malian defence and security forces have, and are supported by, the required capabilities, including the ability to operate in a desert environment and effectively meet the identified threat in northern Mali. Those capabilities still need to be generated. The provision of significant and

timely external support for training, equipment, logistics and funding to both the international operation and the Malian defence and security forces will be of critical importance in the light both of the capabilities required and the threat posed by terrorist and affiliated groups and transnational organized criminal activities. External support will be required for counter-terrorism activities, coordinated border control and sustainable regional counter-terrorism and counter-transnational criminal strategies and operations.

70. A determination of the specific training, equipment and logistics requirements necessitates an urgent assessment of the respective military and police capabilities. Coordination and a clear division of roles and responsibilities for such an assessment and the subsequent filling of any gaps between the Malian authorities, ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union and other international partners will be vital in that regard. A donors' conference could be convened at which respective roles and responsibilities could be further defined and pledges garnered for funding or in-kind contributions. The Peace and Security Council of the African Union, in its communiqué of 13 November, also urged the Security Council to establish a trust fund to that end.

71. On 19 November, the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union considered a crisis management concept under which military training and advice would be provided to the Malian armed forces. The concept is expected to be considered for approval by the Council on 10 December. Furthermore, the Council underlined the importance of adequate financial support for the operation in Mali by the regional States and organizations and other international partners, recalled its willingness to provide support and requested the European Commission to prepare to mobilize funds from the African Peace Facility.

72. Any effort to extend State authority throughout the country, enable humanitarian action, protect civilians, support vulnerable groups and promote national dialogue and governance would also require targeted international assistance in several critical areas. The international force and the Malian defence and security forces will face a significant risk from improvised explosive devices and landmines, which would also affect the safe delivery of humanitarian aid and the return of internally displaced persons and refugees. Training, advisory support and basic equipment will be required for both forces to conduct mine clearance, explosive ordnance disposal and counter-improvised explosive device activities, in addition to weapons and ammunition recovery in the areas recovered from terrorist and affiliated groups. The provision of coordinated external support to mine action and the establishment of national capacity in this sector will be essential.

73. Stabilization will require the strengthening of the national police command and control system and the rebuilding of Government law enforcement structures in the north, including the training and equipping of the gendarmerie and regional police units, border management mechanisms and regional cooperation. Assistance to restore the justice sector, including local prisons and courts in the north, and to promote access to justice in the recovered areas, will be required simultaneously, together with support to transitional justice initiatives. The consolidation of peace will require a fully fledged assistance programme for the return and sustainable integration of internally displaced persons and refugees. Lastly, an initial programme will be required to address the issue of the disarmament and

reintegration of former combatants, including children, incorporating assistance for vulnerable populations associated with former combatants.

74. In the longer term, Mali would benefit from enhancing its security sector governance, oversight and accountability, including early warning structures in the north, and the strengthening of its civil society, especially women's and youth groups. Furthermore, in the light of the deteriorating human rights situation, including risks associated with a military offensive in the north, a strong United Nations human rights component should be envisaged as part of a multidimensional United Nations presence to monitor, report publicly and respond to violations of international humanitarian and human rights law by all parties, including by the eventual military operation. The human rights component should contribute to national and international reconciliation, accountability and humanitarian efforts, participate in United Nations efforts to reform the justice and security sector and support the provision of human rights training. To strengthen the independence and effectiveness of such a United Nations human rights component, the same should be deployed separately by any stabilization force. It would also be important to begin planning for the actions needed to accompany or follow any military operation in the north with regard to the extension of State authority, including rule-of-law and security institutions, mine action, regional cooperation, security sector reform, human rights, institutional development, preliminary demobilization, the disarmament and reintegration of former combatants and the protection of returning refugees and internally displaced persons.

IV. Observations and recommendations

75. I am gravely concerned by the deepening crisis in Mali, which poses a clear threat to international peace and security. Northern Mali is at risk of becoming a permanent haven for terrorists and organized criminal networks where people are subjected to an extremely strict interpretation of sharia law and human rights are systematically abused. Urgent action is required to help the Government and people of Mali to reunify their country, bring about a swift return to constitutional order and deprive Al-Qaida and its affiliates of a platform that enables them to threaten the State, neighbouring countries and the international community as a whole.

76. The complex crisis requires a multifaceted and integrated response in which the political, security, humanitarian and human rights dimensions are well coordinated and mutually reinforcing. The challenges facing Mali also need to be seen in the broader context of a deeply stressed Sahel region. Some of the underlying causes of the current crisis are indigenous to Mali. Others, however, including adverse climate and ecological changes, disaffected local populations, transnational terrorism and organized crime, affect the entire region. The problems of Mali cannot be solved in a lasting manner without maintaining a sharp focus on the Sahel. This is why I decided to appoint Romano Prodi as my Special Envoy for the Sahel with the primary task of developing a United Nations integrated strategy for the region, which I intend to present to the Security Council early in 2013.

77. A military operation may be required as a last resort to deal with the most hard-line extremist and criminal elements in the north. Before that stage is reached, however, the focus must be on initiating a broad-based and inclusive political dialogue aimed at forging national consensus around a road map for the transition

and at addressing the long-standing grievances of the Tuaregs and other communities in the north.

78. The responsibility for political reconciliation rests, first and foremost, with Malians themselves. Malian leaders must unite around the goals of full restoration of constitutional legitimacy and of territorial integrity. It is especially important that they acknowledge long-standing grievances.

79. The recent threat of military intervention, in addition to some other developments, appears to have rendered some groups in the north more amenable to dialogue. The authorities must take advantage of this window of opportunity to put in place a credible framework for negotiations with those who are willing to distance themselves from terrorism. I call upon the authorities to address seriously the legitimate concerns of Malian citizens in the north, with a view to fostering their full participation in the national institutions of governance and the decision-making process. In this regard, I welcome recent statements by the Government that dialogue with MNLA and Ansar Dine is inevitable.

80. I am encouraged that there appears to be broad agreement among key Malian stakeholders that the political process must focus on four core objectives: broad-based and inclusive political dialogue aimed at formulating a road map for the transition; negotiations with armed groups in the north that renounce terrorism; preparations for the holding of elections; and promoting national reconciliation. Nevertheless, divisions persist among Malians on how to achieve these objectives. While the transitional authorities and other stakeholders agree in general terms with these priorities, they differ on the details of implementation. Influential opposition groups consider that, to date, the preparations for the national dialogue have not been sufficiently inclusive or transparent and are threatening a boycott of the entire political process until their concerns are addressed. I am particularly concerned that the launch of the national dialogue has been postponed owing to a lack of consensus among key political actors in Bamako on its format and composition. It is imperative that this important forum begin its work without further delay.

81. The internal divisions constitute the single greatest obstacle to progress on the political track and must be addressed urgently. The Malian authorities must coalesce around a common vision for the future of the country that enjoys the support of various constituencies. This includes creating the conditions and formulating a detailed and realistic timeline for the holding of elections, which are an important component of national reconciliation. While preparations must begin now, so as to create a sense of momentum, the timing will depend on knowing when those in the north can participate fully. Elections that disenfranchise portions of the population could reinforce, rather than bridge, divisions.

82. The authorities have indicated that they welcome direct United Nations involvement in support of the political process. My Special Envoy for the Sahel has included Mali as part of his efforts to develop a United Nations integrated strategy for the region. My Special Representative for West Africa has been working closely with the authorities in Bamako, other national stakeholders, regional leaders and ECOWAS to push forward the political process. I have also dispatched an electoral needs assessment mission to Bamako to help the authorities to tackle the challenges facing the electoral process.

83. I believe that, beyond these efforts, a full-time United Nations political presence, including expertise in human rights and other key areas, is urgently needed in Bamako to monitor and report on the situation and provide day-to-day support and advice to the authorities and other key national stakeholders. I intend to strengthen the United Nations presence in Bamako in the coming days through the deployment of a senior United Nations official who will be responsible for interacting on a daily basis with key stakeholders, under the direction of my Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, and will also report to my Special Representative for West Africa and to my Special Envoy for the Sahel.

84. While it is my fervent hope that the country can be reunified through negotiations, it is likely that there will ultimately be some terrorists and criminals with whom no dialogue is possible. Inaction by the international community may prolong the suffering of those in the north who are living under the brutal yoke of the extremists and are seeing their cultural heritage being destroyed. Every passing day brings with it the risk of a further entrenchment of terrorist groups and criminal networks. Nevertheless, I am profoundly aware that, if a military intervention in the north is not well conceived and executed, it could worsen an already extremely fragile humanitarian situation and also result in severe human rights abuses. It could also risk ruining any chance of a negotiated political solution to the crisis, which remains the best hope for achieving long-term stability in Mali.

85. On 13 November, the African Union endorsed the ECOWAS/African Union strategic operational framework for the African-led international support mission for Mali, which was previously endorsed by the ECOWAS chiefs of defence staff on 6 November, by its Mediation and Security Council on 9 November and by its Heads of State and Government on 11 November. I welcome the efforts that have gone into this important document, while recognizing that further planning and preparations are under way. As these areas are addressed, it could provide a useful basis for consideration of the call by the Peace and Security Council for the Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter, to authorize States members of the African Union to establish an African-led international support mission for Mali for an initial period of one year, comprising 3,300 personnel, to take all measures necessary, as appropriate, to assist the Malian authorities to recover the occupied regions in the north of Mali in order to restore the country's unity and territorial integrity and reduce the threats posed by terrorist and affiliated groups and transnational organized crime.

86. Fundamental questions on how the force would be led, sustained, trained, equipped and financed remain unanswered. Plans for both the international force and the Malian security and defence forces need to be developed further. They should include details on a harmonized operation with a clear division of functions, effective command and control and legitimate civilian authority oversight of the defence and security forces. This planning should also be synchronized with regional and international plans for counter-terrorism and border control and to counter criminal networks. Measures to mitigate the possible impact of a military operation on the extremely fragile humanitarian and human rights situation in northern Mali and the subregion must be incorporated into every stage and facet of the planning process.

87. The effective implementation of the strategic operational framework will require significant and timely external support for training, equipment, logistics and

funding for both the international force and the Malian defence and security forces. There is an urgent need to assess and fill capability gaps in the Malian military and police. In this regard, coordination and a clear division of roles and responsibilities between the Malian authorities, ECOWAS and the African Union, in addition to the United Nations, the European Union and other international partners, will be vital. The United Nations could facilitate, in support of the African Union and other key stakeholders, contributions by bilateral and other stakeholders, on the basis of a determination of requirements, possibly through a donors' conference.

88. In this regard, I commend the decision of the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union on 19 November to welcome the presentation of a crisis management concept for a military training mission in Mali, which is expected to be considered for approval on 10 December. I also welcome its request to the European Commission to mobilize funds from the African Peace Facility for the operation in Mali. The contributions of other partners will be similarly critical, including for the continuing planning and preparation efforts.

89. Should the Council authorize the support mission, it is essential that the Council play an active role in ensuring that African-led and Malian forces engaged in any military offensives in the north are held fully accountable for their actions. I would therefore strongly recommend that in any relevant resolution the Council request the African Union to report to it on a regular basis on the activities of the support mission. As part of this accountability process, it may be advisable for the Council to request the African Union and the Malian authorities to meet specific benchmarks for the commencement of offensive operations, including the demonstrated operational readiness of the Malian forces and the support mission; positive developments in the political process on the part of, primarily, the leadership in Bamako; and the effective training of military and police personnel of both the support mission and the Malian forces in their obligations under international human rights, humanitarian and refugee law.

90. Both the support mission and the Malian defence and security forces would be required to act in compliance with applicable international humanitarian and human rights law in the performance of any mandate authorized by the Council and in full respect of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Mali and neighbouring countries. The deployment of a sufficient number of United Nations human rights observers should be mandated to monitor strict adherence to international humanitarian and human rights law, to advise on ways to mitigate any adverse impact on the civilian population and to report publicly in this regard.

91. The request by the African Union to the Security Council to authorize a United Nations support package for an offensive military operation raises serious questions. The impact on the image of the United Nations and its ability to play a meaningful role in supporting short-term humanitarian and emergency assistance efforts and longer-term stabilization efforts in Mali, in addition to the implications for the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the region, must be weighed carefully. Furthermore, the Organization has limited ability to deliver a support package in the near term to a combat force. The tools available to it, such as commercial procurement, involve strict procedures to ensure accountability for the use of funds. These could place significant restrictions on its ability to support offensive military operations in the north.

92. As the international response to the crisis in Mali takes shape, there are a number of areas in which the United Nations could play a role, taking into account lessons learned from prior experience. The Organization is not best placed to directly tackle the security threat posed by terrorists and affiliated groups. AQIM and its affiliates, armed with sophisticated weaponry and training, can be expected to forcibly oppose any deployment of Malian and/or international forces. Targeted military operations may be required to dislodge them from northern Mali, in which case Member States may decide to directly support the military activity needed to combat such groups.

93. Irrespective of who undertakes such an activity, funding for the initial combat-related military operations could be through voluntary or bilateral contributions. Once the objectives of the initial military operation have been achieved, the Council could consider the option of providing a United Nations logistics package to assist an international force during stabilization operations.

94. In the meantime, the United Nations could continue to support the support mission and the Malian authorities with planning and preparations for an intervention in the north, as well as in critical areas that will be required to accompany or follow any operation with regard to the extension of State authority. This would include rule of law and security institutions, mine action, promotion of national dialogue, regional cooperation, security sector reform, human rights and the initial demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of former combatants.

95. Any support provided by the United Nations to the support mission or the Malian armed forces would have to be in strict compliance with the United Nations human rights due diligence policy, which is intended to contribute to the protection of civilians while enhancing the effectiveness of non-United Nations security forces that receive United Nations support. Under the policy, United Nations support cannot be provided where there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of the receiving entities committing grave violations of international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law and where the relevant authorities fail to take the necessary corrective or mitigating measures. The United Nations would have to carry out such a risk assessment and identify relevant mitigating measures as soon as possible and, in any case, before support is provided. Such support would also need to comply with United Nations defence sector reform policy, which highlights parameters for the provision of United Nations direct or indirect assistance to defence sector institutions. The Secretariat would welcome direction in the mandate from the Council that it should consult all partners and potential recipients of United Nations support in connection with operations in Mali, the purpose of which would be to ensure that the requisite measures are undertaken and mechanisms put in place to ensure the implementation of the human rights due diligence and defence sector reform policies.

96. As noted above, I intend to take immediate steps to strengthen the United Nations presence in Bamako with a strong human rights capacity. This presence could evolve into a multidimensional United Nations mission with a mandate to provide the Malian authorities with long-term stabilization and peacebuilding assistance. Such a mission would include a strong human rights presence to monitor, report and respond to international humanitarian and human rights law violations by all parties and contribute to supporting the national authorities in protecting human rights. The United Nations would need to begin planning and preparations

immediately in order to ensure that no security or administrative vacuum emerges from a possible military intervention in the north. Should the Council concur, I will initiate an integrated assessment and planning process and revert with specific proposals for further consideration.

97. Funding for the possible activities outlined above could be provided through United Nations assessed contributions, voluntary contributions and/or bilateral or multilateral direct contributions. The potential financial implications of the proposed operations would depend on further guidance on, and the development of, the areas presented herein, in addition to an indication from the Council. Nevertheless, a preliminary indication of possible costs would be presented separately to the Council. Consideration could also be given to the possible deployment of a United Nations peacekeeping operation after the end of major combat operations.

98. I believe that it is imperative that the international community act swiftly to help to restore Mali's territorial integrity and deal with the terrorist threat in the north. I remain convinced that the complex challenges facing Mali require a comprehensive, coordinated and multifaceted response, within the broader context of an integrated strategy for the Sahel. The urgent need for progress on the political track cannot be overstated. I reiterate my call upon all Malians to engage in an inclusive national dialogue aimed at healing the rifts that have brought disaster upon their country.

99. While military force may be required at some stage as a last resort to rid the north of Al-Qaida and its affiliates, it is of paramount importance that every effort be made to minimize the potential humanitarian and human rights consequences of such action. Humanitarian considerations must therefore be factored into the planning process from the outset in order to avoid further suffering and population displacement and to ensure that humanitarian workers are able to gain access to those in need.

100. The United Nations is already active on several fronts. Humanitarian agencies are deeply engaged in reaching vulnerable populations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is assessing human rights concerns and needs and technical experts in elections have begun their work with the Malian authorities. My Special Envoy for the Sahel is focused on the Sahel-wide issues that, if unaddressed, will make a sustainable solution in Mali impossible. My Special Representative for West Africa has increased his engagement with the Malian transitional authorities, groups in northern Mali and ECOWAS to support negotiations, while military planners have provided assistance to ECOWAS in developing the concept for the support mission. I believe that it would be more appropriate for United Nations partners in Mali, the region and the international community to do what may be required in other areas, such as counter-terrorism and potential offensive military operations in the north, where the United Nations is not best suited to play a direct role.